

# WHY IS EVERYONE SO CRANKY?

Road rage, air rage, express lane rage, sports rage, and now desk rage. As "rage" becomes all the rage, perhaps you agree that people don't seem as nice as they used to be. At home, at work, and in between, they are impatient, easily irritated, demanding, or downright rude. They don't want to wait, they don't want to cooperate, they don't want to be inconvenienced by anyone or anything. They want their way and they want it now! The problem is easy to spot but hard to stop. *Never have so many, with so much, been so unhappy!*

From coast to coast, in rural areas and big cities alike; people are chronically busy, trying to move faster, achieve more, accumulate more, and do more with less. Rising costs of doing business, global competition, and market uncertainty drive ongoing attempts to expand system capacity while reducing the investment of doing so (better-faster-cheaper), complicated by resource limitations such as time, people, budget, space, equipment, etc. No wonder you find yourself playing "catch up" in a complex game where someone keeps changing the rules!

Given this backdrop, it's easy to understand why so many of us are experiencing so much stress, yet it's tempting to dismiss our symptoms because there's no time to address the possible cause. We too often allow workplace and personal conflicts to go unaddressed because of lack of time. In fact, we barely have time to process what's happening now, let alone what went on yesterday.

The question is not "have you been infected" by the anger epidemic, the question is "to what extent have you been infected?" Given our challenging cultural climate that shows few signs of mellowing, how can you resist the pressures of ten social forces that are complicating your life? Be prepared to move beyond the old practice of time management: you are entering the era of "choice management"! Making this mental shift will help you exercise more control over what you do, when, with whom, and why.

Are you risking your health or well-being from trying to keep pace with a world that refuses to slow down? Are you trying to do your best in the midst of morale issues, internal conflict, personal distress, or professional overload? Are you easing your stress load or adding to it? Or are you too overwhelmed to care? Let's look at how you and your work team are being affected, personally and professionally, by the ten trends outlined in *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?*

**COMPRESSED TIME • COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD**  
**dis-CONNECTEDNESS • COST • COMPETITION**  
**CUSTOMER CONTACT • COMPUTERS • CHANGE**  
**COMING OF AGE • COMPLEXITY**

From *STICK TO IT!*:

"In the absence of  
feedback  
we make up  
our own version  
of reality."

—Leslie Charles

From  
*WHY IS EVERYONE SO  
CRANKY?*

"At the bedrock of our Anger Epidemic lies a compelling, complicating presence in our lives: The Expectation Machine, a conglomerate of illusions, impossible-to-deliver-promises, and erroneous beliefs that feed a highly fantasized version of The Perfect Life. Its fallout affects us both at an individual and societal level. Each of the last five decades brought with it a set of promises and expectations. While most of these promises were never realized, advertisements, media images, and intriguing illusions of futurists persistently fed our hope for a future far out of our grasp. Our cynicism rose, but so did our expectations. If you're thinking this makes no sense, you're right."

## ILLUSIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND REALITY

*As our most "public" of government agencies, NASA not only offers the latest in leading edge science, technology, and research, it also taps into the collective of human potential; creating goals that seem like dreams, achieving them, and redefining our concept of "the impossible." Thanks to what we could call "the human condition," every NASA success raises expectations, and every failure erodes credibility, creating an ever-widening chasm between the two. Ironically, the more you accomplish, the lower the public's tolerance for your errors.*

The average citizen has a limited understanding of science, technology, and the scientific process. Therefore, they don't grasp, nor do they expect, that failure is an inevitable part of any scientific endeavor.

The average citizen is unable to fathom the complexity of NASA projects, and consequently, when things go wrong, the only thing they know for sure is the end result. People are often unable to discover the "success points" in an outcome that appears to be a failure.

The average citizen lives with constant money pressures and the astronomical cost of space exploration is daunting. Some fail to see the cost-versus-benefit ratio in something so remote to their daily lives and they resent the expenditure.

The average citizen is driven by a blend of ego and insecurity. People typically operate more from their emotionals than rational thought. Your message is subject to wildly fluctuating interpretations because when people can't grasp a situation they are likely to criticize, distort, or dismiss it.

Given these aspects of our human nature, here are some points to keep in mind when you're trying to communicate your vision, whether within the confines of the campus, or to members of the public. Human beings are inclined to favor:

*PEOPLE over places*

*IMAGE over issues*

*ENTERTAINMENT over education*

*ECONOMICS over explanation*

*PERSONAL NEEDS over collective needs*

**How can you use these concepts as a communication strategy when you're trying to make someone understand, comprehend, or embrace your ideas?**

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From *STICK TO IT!*:  
“Life begins to get  
a little easier  
when we’re willing  
to make hard choices.”  
—Leslie Charles

## **HOMEWORK: TAMING THE TEN TRENDS...**

### **COMPRESSED TIME**

**SYMPTOMS:** Chronic sense of time urgency; constant hurrying; sleep deprivation; speeding; rushing; rudeness; talking fast; hurrying others.  
*One choice I need to make so I can curb this sense of time compression:*

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### **COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD**

**SYMPTOMS:** Fixation on news droppings/media trivia/ TV; discomfort with silence; inability to relax; massive "to do" pile; compulsive consumerism.  
*One way I can begin to relieve my feelings of chronic overload:*

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### **Dis-CONNECTEDNESS**

**SYMPTOMS:** Preoccupation with work and self; distanced personal and work relationships; emotional withdrawal; loss of compassion; growing resentment. *One way I can reconnect with myself and those around me:*

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### **COST CRANKINESS**

**SYMPTOMS:** Constant money worries and conflicts; compulsion to accumulate, portfolio preoccupation; moments of frugality to extravagance; Lotto fantasies. *One way I can have a more relaxed attitude toward money:*

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### **COMPETITION CLASHES**

**SYMPTOMS:** Time, space, money, resource limitations; downsizing, job complications, fraying loyalties, status, and personal competitiveness. *One way I can remind myself to maintain balance and perspective in spite of it all:*

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From *STICK TO IT!*:  
“The next time someone  
pushes your buttons  
remind yourself  
that you're the one  
who installed them.”  
—Leslie Charles

## CUSTOMER CONTACT CONFLICTS

**SYMPTOMS:** Big promises and small delivery; rudeness, indifference; incompetence; lack of common courtesy on both sides of the transaction.  
*One way I can personally support and practice service in our culture:*

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## COMPUTER COMPLICATIONS

**SYMPTOMS:** Fear of technology to fixation with it; preoccupation with cyber activities; excessive dependence on machinery; physical and "emotional insulation" from the real world. *One way I can stay balanced in this area:*

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## CHANGE CONSTERNATION

**SYMPTOMS:** Denial /refusal to acknowledge critical indicators; trivializing or demonizing "different" ideas; resistance to personal transformation.  
*One way I can keep myself open to inevitable organizational/personal change:*

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## COMING OF AGE CRAMPS

**SYMPTOMS:** Preoccupation with youthfulness; self-consciousness about aging; poor health maintenance and self-neglect; giving up; losing vitality; burning out. *One way I can make age a positive force in my life:*

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## COMPLEXITY CRIMPS

**SYMPTOMS:** Overwhelm from option glut; frustration with social institutions; confusion over moral, ethical, political, and philosophical issues; feelings of letdown; disappointment.  
*One way I can simplify rather than complicate my life:*

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From *STICK TO IT!*:

"The message we most need to hear is the one we will most resist."

—Leslie Charles

From

#### *WHY IS EVERYONE SO CRANKY?*

"Creating the life you once only dreamed of takes work. But it's a gradual process and doesn't demand herculean effort. It only requires a series of small changes, consistently practiced over a period of time. You don't have to jump off a cliff or take a dramatic plunge. *You just need to put conscious thought into what you want and how you plan to make it happen.*"

## ANTI-CRANKY ALTERNATIVES: THERE IS A BETTER WAY

1. **Pace yourself.** Slow down; quit rushing, worrying, and hurrying yourself or others. Drive the speed limit! Live each day consciously and purposefully.
2. **Limit your media exposure.** Balance bad news with positive visions and healthy thought. Cultivate silence, quiet spaces, and places into your daily life.
3. **Regularly revisit your priorities** and commit to living in sync with them. Refuse to let yourself be emotionally distant from those you love: repair, cultivate, and upgrade your important relationships before it's too late.
4. **Evaluate your spending/saving habits and live within your means.** Be grateful for what you have instead of fixating on what you don't have. Consider the nonmonetary costs of self-imposed pressures such as chronic resentment, discontent self-indulgence or anger over how unfair life is.
5. **Cultivate collaboration.** Refuse to compete against those you live or work with. Cultivate patience so you can be a "relationship builder" by accepting people's inconsistencies and mistakes.
6. **Make service a part of your life.** Make service a way of life. From work to home, treat others well as a matter of course. If you give good service when you're the customer; it will often improve the way you're treated.
7. **Use your technology skills prudently.** Practice people first paper second. Don't let technology constantly interrupt you or take precedence over people.
8. **Embrace change rather than resist it.** Learn from every change you experience, whether it's forced on you or self-selected. Rather than channeling your energy into disapproval, cultivate acceptance and action instead.
9. **Accept the natural process of aging.** Resist the pressures of youth fixation or age bias. Accept and learn from people of all ages. Take good care of yourself in small ways every day. You'll feel better; maybe even live longer!
10. **Cultivate self-knowledge.** The more you learn, the better your life will get. You've explored outer space; now's the time to discover your "inner space." Self-knowledge is the critical skill of the 21st Century!

*Goddard's eight organizational values are worthy of personal application, too:*

- EMOTIONAL AGILITY • BALANCE • LIVING CREATIVELY •
- DEDICATION AND PERSISTENCE • INTEGRITY •
- RESPECT • STRETCHING YOURSELF SAFELY •
- TEAMWORK AT GODDARD AND HOME •